

APLA

AIDS Project Los Angeles

25 YEARS

Date: March 20, 2009

To: Mike Genest, Director, California Department of Finance

Bill Lockyer, Treasurer, State of California

From: Craig Thompson, Executive Director, AIDS Project Los Angeles

RE: Public Comment on Federal Stimulus Funding To Offset Trigger Cuts

On behalf of the board, clients, and staff of AIDS Project Los Angeles, I urge you to ensure that all eligible federal funding be taken into consideration in order to make the \$10 billion threshold set by the California Legislature in February. Reaching this benchmark will prevent the \$948 million in trigger cuts from being implemented on July 1, 2009.

The trigger cuts include the elimination of several Medi-Cal optional benefits, including Adult Dental Benefits (Denti-Cal). This program is critical in identifying advanced AIDS-related conditions in patients with HIV. Oral health plays a significant role in an individual's overall health status, and HIV-positive patients receiving care in the public health sector are almost certain to have significant dental disease.

Dental hygiene is not simply a routine matter for people with HIV. Dentists were often the first medical practitioners to spot common HIV opportunistic infections such as leucoplakia, oral candidiasis, esophageal thrush, and oral KS. Today, dentists continue to spot oral deterioration that affects HIV health. Oral health also affects an individual's ability to eat; lack of proper nutrition leads to overall decline in general health.

As a result of Denti-Cal, Californians with HIV or AIDS can seek dental treatment even if they can't afford it. The preventive nature of dental care visits actually saves California taxpayers in the long run by reducing costly emergency room visits by Medi-Cal patients.

The importance of this program to Californians with HIV cannot be overemphasized. Like other agencies and individuals who provided public comment during your March 17th hearing, APLA urges you to consider all available federal funding when determining whether or not California will reach the \$10 billion benchmark by July 1st. Eliminating

Medi-Cal optional benefits, especially Adult Dental, will likely result in more people ending up in emergency rooms, at a greater cost to the State. Additionally, oral health care has provided low-income Californians with a safety net program for decades. Once eliminated, it will be difficult to reinstate this program. While that may well serve California's budget woes, it will only increase misery, suffering and need amongst a population that already has plenty of troubles of its own.

APLA's Dental Clinic is the largest dedicated provider of dental services to people with HIV in Los Angeles County, serving approximately 1,700 unique, individual clients per year. Our staff includes three full time dentists and three full time dental assistants, as well as a full time hygienist along with support staff. The Clinic's services run the full range from prophylaxes to fillings, extractions, crowns and bridgework.